

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1           1.   For use in a processor, an instruction handling  
2 system for determining instruction folding comprising:

3               at least one fold decoder associated with an  
4 instruction fetch buffer stack,

5               the at least one fold decoder coupled to a set of  
6 successive entries within the instruction fetch buffer  
7 stack and examining contents within the successive entries  
8 prior to a main decode of the contents within the  
9 successive entries to determine whether the successive  
10 entries contain two or more instructions which may be  
11 folded,

12              the at least one fold decoder generating fold-  
13 status information for the contents within the successive  
14 entries indicating whether the successive entries contain  
15 two or more instructions which may be folded.

1           2.    The instruction handling system as set forth in  
2    Claim 1 wherein the at least one fold decoder further  
3    comprises:

4                a plurality of fold decoders associated with the  
5    instruction fetch buffer stack and including the at least  
6    one fold decoder,

7                each fold decoder coupled to a different set of  
8    successive entries within the instruction fetch buffer  
9    stack, wherein the different sets of successive entries  
10   overlap, and examining contents within a corresponding set  
11   of successive entries to determine whether the  
12   corresponding set of successive entries contain two or more  
13   instructions which may be folded,

14               each fold decoder generating fold-status  
15   information for the contents within the corresponding set  
16   of successive entries indicating whether the corresponding  
17   set of successive entries contain two or more instructions  
18   which may be folded.

1           3.    The instruction handling system as set forth in  
2    Claim 2 wherein the fold-status information produced by  
3    each fold decoder includes a number of instructions which  
4    may be folded and a size of each instruction which may be  
5    folded.

1           4. The instruction handling system as set forth in  
2 Claim 2 wherein the fold-status information for each set of  
3 successive entries is stored in association with the  
4 respective set of successive entries within the instruction  
5 fetch buffer stack.

1           5. The instruction handling system as set forth in  
2 Claim 1 wherein the at least one fold decoder checks the  
3 contents within the successive entries for instructions of  
4 a variable size and for possible folding of a variable  
5 number of instructions.

1           6. The instruction handling system as set forth in  
2 Claim 1 further comprising:

3           a decoder receiving the fold-status information  
4 together with the contents of the successive entries for  
5 translation of the contents of the successive entries into  
6 signals which may be operated on by an execution unit.

1           7. The instruction handling system as set forth in  
2 Claim 1 wherein the decoder employs the fold-status  
3 information during folding of at least the contents of the  
4 successive entries into a single operation.

1           8.    A processor comprising:

2                    an instruction fetch mechanism retrieving

3 instructions for storage within an instruction fetch

4 buffer;

5                    an instruction decode mechanism for translating

6 instructions into signals which may be operated on by at

7 least one execution unit; and

8                    an instruction handling system coupled between

9 the instruction fetch buffer and instruction decode

10 mechanism for determining instruction folding comprising:

11                            at least one fold decoder associated with an

12 instruction fetch buffer stack,

13                            the at least one fold decoder coupled to a

14 set of successive entries within the instruction fetch

15 buffer stack and examining contents within the

16 successive entries prior to a main decode of the

17 contents within the successive entries to determine

18 whether the successive entries contain two or more

19 instructions which may be folded,

20                            the at least one fold decoder generating

21 fold-status information for the contents within the

22 successive entries indicating whether the successive

23 entries contain two or more instructions which may be

24 folded.

1           9.    The processor as set forth in Claim 8 wherein the  
2   at least one fold decoder further comprises:

3               a plurality of fold decoders associated with the  
4   instruction fetch buffer stack and including the at least  
5   one fold decoder,

6               each fold decoder coupled to a different set of  
7   successive entries within the instruction fetch buffer  
8   stack, wherein the different sets of successive entries  
9   overlap, and examining contents within a corresponding set  
10   of successive entries to determine whether the  
11   corresponding set of successive entries contain two or more  
12   instructions which may be folded,

13              each fold decoder generating fold-status  
14   information for the contents within the corresponding set  
15   of successive entries indicating whether the corresponding  
16   set of successive entries contain two or more instructions  
17   which may be folded.

1           10.   The processor as set forth in Claim 9 wherein the  
2   fold-status information produced by each fold decoder  
3   includes a number of instructions which may be folded and a  
4   size of each instruction which may be folded.

1           11. The processor as set forth in Claim 9 wherein the  
2           fold-status information for each set of successive entries  
3           is stored in association with the respective set of  
4           successive entries within the instruction fetch buffer  
5           stack.

1           12. The processor as set forth in Claim 8 wherein the  
2           at least one fold decoder checks the contents within the  
3           successive entries for instructions of a variable size and  
4           for possible folding of a variable number of instructions.

1           13. The processor as set forth in Claim 8 wherein the  
2           instruction decode mechanism receives the fold-status  
3           information together with the contents of the successive  
4           entries.

1           14. The processor as set forth in Claim 8 wherein the  
2           instruction decode mechanism employs the fold-status  
3           information during folding of at least the contents of the  
4           successive entries into a single operation.

1           15. For use in a processor, a method of determining  
2 instruction folding comprising:

3                 prior to decoding contents within a set of  
4 successive entries within an instruction fetch buffer  
5 stack,

6                 examining the contents within the successive  
7 entries to determine whether the successive entries  
8 contain two or more instructions which may be folded;  
9 and

10                generating fold-status information for the  
11 contents within the successive entries indicating  
12 whether the successive entries contain two or more  
13 instructions which may be folded.  
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1           16. The method as set forth in Claim 15 wherein the  
2       step of examining the contents within the successive  
3       entries to determine whether the successive entries contain  
4       two or more instructions which may be folded further  
5       comprises:

6           examining contents within each of a different set  
7       of successive entries within the instruction fetch buffer  
8       stack, wherein the different sets of successive entries  
9       overlap, to determine whether the corresponding set of  
10       successive entries contain two or more instructions which  
11       may be folded.

12           17. The method as set forth in Claim 16 wherein the  
13       step of generating fold-status information for the contents  
14       within the successive entries indicating whether the  
15       successive entries contain two or more instructions which  
16       may be folded further comprises:

17           generating fold-status information for the  
18       contents within each set of successive entries indicating  
19       whether the corresponding set of successive entries contain  
20       two or more instructions which may be folded, wherein the  
21       fold-status information includes a number of instructions  
22       which may be folded and a size of each instruction which  
23       may be folded.

1           18. The method as set forth in Claim 16 further  
2 comprising:

3           storing the fold-status information for each set  
4 of successive entries in association with the respective  
5 set of successive entries within the instruction fetch  
6 buffer stack.

1           19. The method as set forth in Claim 15 wherein the  
2 step of examining contents within each of a different set  
3 of successive entries within the instruction fetch buffer  
4 stack further comprises:

5           checking the contents within the successive  
6 entries for instructions of a variable size and for  
7 possible folding of a variable number of instructions.

1           20. The method as set forth in Claim 15 further  
2 comprising:

3           transmitting the fold-status information together  
4 with the contents of the successive entries to an  
5 instruction decoder translating the contents of the  
6 successive entries into signals which may be operated on by  
7 an execution unit; and

8           employing the fold-status information during  
9 folding of at least the contents of the successive entries  
10 into a single operation within the instruction decoder.